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SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CEN AND DRL

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KHUM KDEM PE NU

SUBJECT: ORTEGA PROVIDES ASYLUM TO PERUVIAN INDIGENOUS LEADER

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT J CALLAHAN, FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) On June 9, Tomas Borge, Nicaragua's Ambassador to Peru, announced that President Daniel Ortega would grant asylum to Peruvian indigenous leader Alberto Pizango. The Nicaraguan government argued that Pizango was a victim of political persecution and granted him asylum based on humanitarian grounds. Pizango, Borge stated, feared persecution after receiving threats from Peruvian President Alan Garcia's government. Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Samuel Santos explained that the government's decision was based on direct instructions from President Ortega. Borge emphasized that it was not the Nicaraguan government's intention to interfere in Peru's internal affairs and hoped Pizango's asylum would not negatively affect the Nicaraguan-Peruvian relationship. Borge explained that Nicaragua granting Pizango asylum was similar to Peru's decision to grant Venezuelan opposition leader Manuel Rosales asylum. Presidential advisor Lenin Cerna was visiting the Foreign Ministry when the announcement was made. He denied any involvement in the affair, but said he supported the indigenous leader's fight against oppression.

¶2. (SBU) The same day and after the Nicaraguan government's announcement of the asylum decision, dozens of people celebrated outside the Peruvian embassy in Managua and protested the Peruvian government's treatment of the indigenous population. This forced the embassy to close its doors and blocked street traffic. Among the participants were the Solidarity Committee with Venezuela, members of the Citizen Power Councils (CPCs), the Indigenous Movement of Monimbo, Pro World Peace, Peruvian citizens, and Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) party-youth. Protesters yelled "asesino" ("assassin"), referring to Peruvian president Alan Garcia, who they likened to Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza. The protesters denied their actions were politically motivated, stating they acted in solidarity with oppressed indigenous groups.

¶3. (SBU) Various groups in Nicaragua questioned Ortega's motives in granting Pizango asylum, as well as the process by which asylum was granted. National Assembly Deputy Wilfredo Navarro (of the Constitutional Liberal Party, PLC) said that the Nicaraguan government should not be granting asylum to people who are involved in conflicts in other countries. Navarro contended that the indigenous people have a right to protest, but argued that their cause has been undermined by interventions from Evo Morales, Hugo Chavez, and Daniel

Ortega's governments. Bayardo Izaba, Executive Director of the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (Cenidh), said the Nicaraguan government should first determine whether or not Pizango is an indigenous leader and is in fact eligible for political asylum. He explained that the constitution grants political asylum to individuals who have been persecuted for defending democracy, peace, and human rights in their country and emphasized the importance of distinguishing such an individual from one who has committed a common crime.

¶4. (C) Comment: As is becoming customary under the Ortega administration, the Nicaraguan government's decision to grant asylum to Pizango came directly from the presidency and circumvented state institutions and established legal procedures. Borge's statement comparing the Pizango case to Rosales situation also leads one to believe that Ortega's decision was not based solely on Pizango's eligibility for asylum or affinity with indigenous groups, but rather on Ortega's solidarity with Hugo Chavez.

CALLAHAN